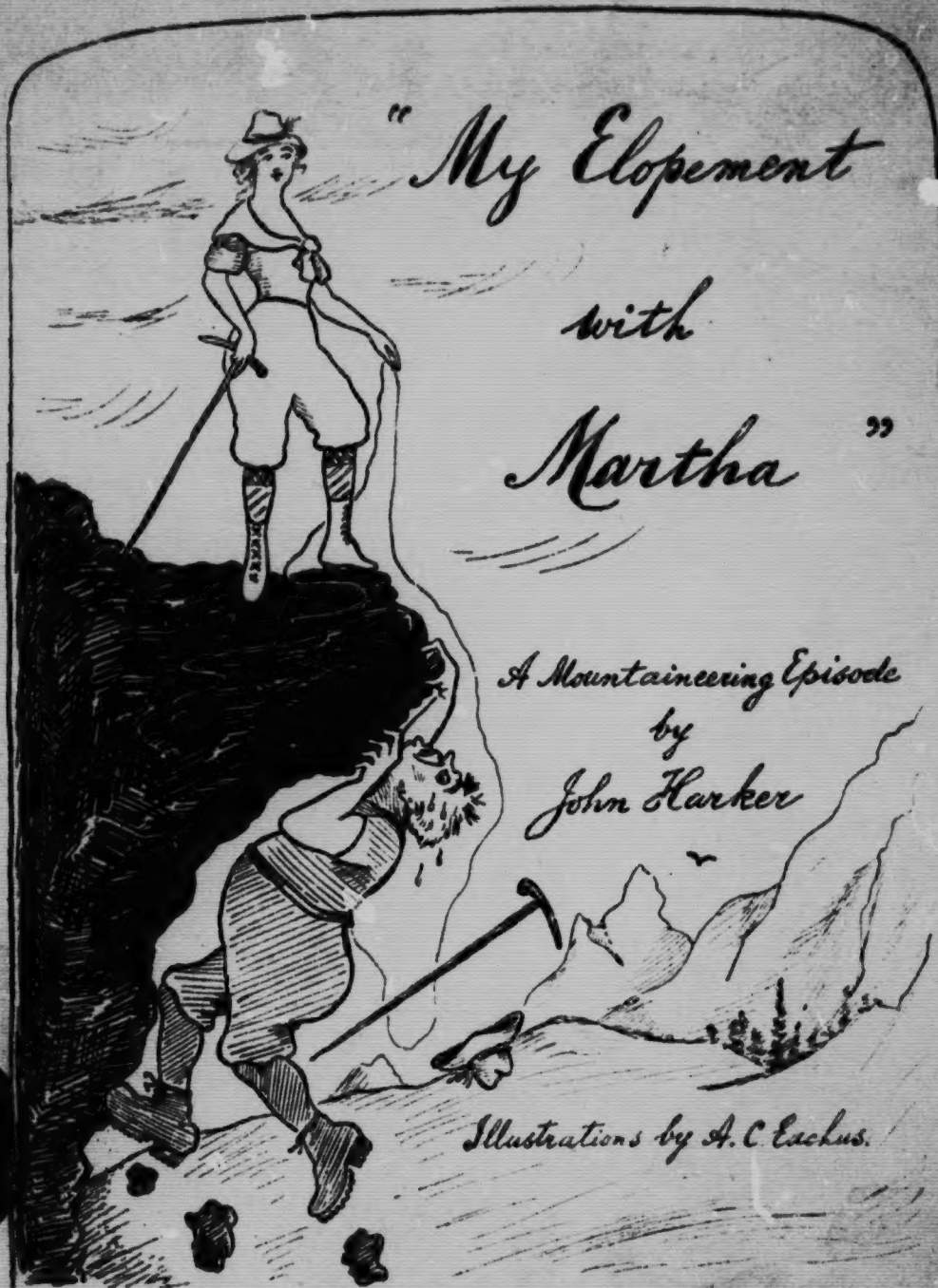


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"My Elopement
with
Martha"

A Mountaineering Episode
by
John Harker

Illustrations by A. C. Eachus.

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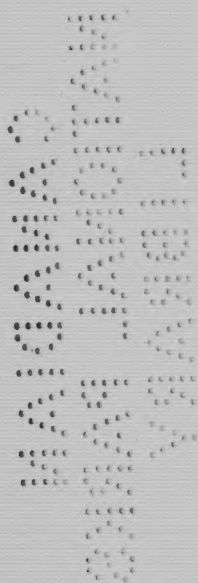
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"Respectfully dedicated to those cheery Amazonian spirits, who, having spurred mere man on to mountaineering effort all day, soothe his physical ills with their presence around the camp fire when the evening shadows fall, and to all dutiful wives who consent thereto."





MY ELOPEMENT WITH MARTHA

A MOUNTAINEERING EPISODE



MARTHA

Perhaps to be technically exact I should call these reminiscences "Martha's Elopement with Me!" That would not quite hit the nail on the head, because it *was* an escape or running away, but I did the escaping and running, not Martha.

Do not for one moment imagine, kind reader, should you rejoice in the appellation of "Martha," that there is anything personal in this narrative, or that I am thinking

of you in particular. Martha is the embodiment of all we men find in the gentler sex ever to a more or less extent spiritually present, urging us on with the magical word "Excelsior," whether it be mountaineering or any other feat requiring some effort, and never leaving us until it



THE GLAD HAND
(Other "Features" deleted by Censor)



IT WAS A CHEERFUL PROSPECT !

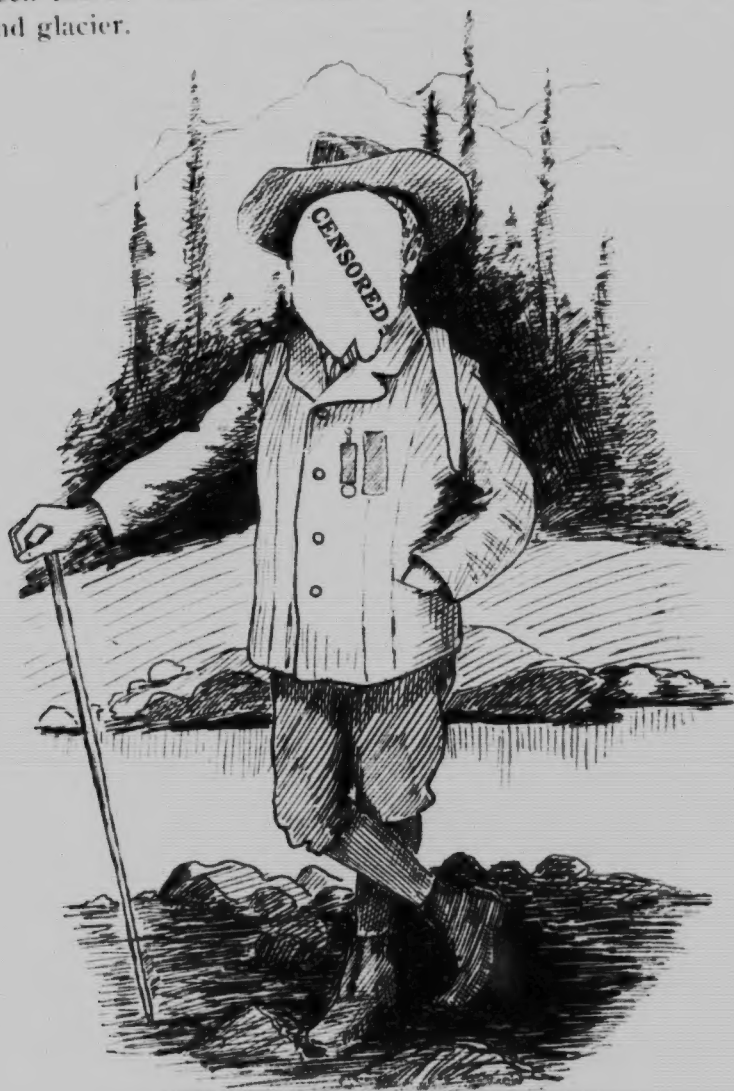
is accomplished. "Martha" is the name I have chosen, and "Martha" I mean to stick to throughout these pages, just as "Martha" stuck to me.

To be brief, I have been a member of the Alpine Club of Canada for five years. With what enthusiasm I joined and mentally painted a beautiful halo around my head as a Graduating Member at the first succeeding Camp, others have no doubt experienced and the rest can very well imagine. It was not to happen, however—the halo was not for me. There appeared to be more alluring, albeit less satisfying recreation near at hand, or that evil spirit "Procrastination" acquired a foothold, and the year went by.



AROUND THE CAMP FIRE

It was the next year I first heard of Martha. She had been there. She had climbed the 10,000 feet over rock and glacier.



THE GREAT MOGUL!

I felt a gentle tapping at the storehouse door of things neglected. A gentler voice with apparent timidity



A GOOD START

seemed to say, "Get up for your climb," and I, poor slothful mortal, turned again on the other side to sleep—it was so much easier—and so this other year rolled on.

The War upon us, perhaps, afforded some reasonable excuse for unfulfilled qualifications to some who obeyed the Higher Call, or tried to do so.

Not so the year that followed, and Martha plainly told me so, when, figuratively speaking, she packed her dunnage bag and hit the trail to Banff, to make her third real ascent. The fishing was very good in the Spray Lakes that year, and oh! how I wanted to hunt mountain goat and sheep in the fall. I abandoned the task at hand for the pursuit of the chase.

If there is any Graduating comrade as delinquent as I, whose resolutions have fallen unfulfilled on the hillside leading to the Club House, even as mine, I hope, companion in misery, Martha's spirit troubles you as much as it did me. I know of one such case—perhaps it is yours, sympathetic reader!

Martha returned from her third Camp calm and dignified, with the conscious strength born of something attempted, something done. The subject was not alluded to. Her spirit treated me with cold disdain. I had played truant for the third time since the first gentle reminders reached me from her spiritual world. I had fished in the Spray and shot my limit of mountain goat—I had clearly departed from the path of duty—I was still unqualified for the Alpine Club of Canada—almost an outcast.

When the Camp at Hector was announced this year, conscious of some spiritual irritation, I took counsel with myself, and summoned Martha. I expected a scolding. I expected to be told I was not worthy of any further effort on her part. To my relief she was kind and forgiving; in fact, she was quite sympathetic with my contrite spirit. Her message was brief and very simple. "Wilt thou climb now?" she said, and with all the courage I could summon I heartily replied, "I will."

The compact was made. Her spirit was to go with me to cheer, urge and carry me on. The camp was well nigh over. Time was of considerable moment. Oh, how I regretted, at every turn of the hurry and bustle of getting away, the past opportunities; when, in the light of subsequent events, I might have climbed even as Martha, and never have been missed from the High Executioner's list in the toiling world of the plains.

It was a gorgeous morning, after the much needed showers during the night, when we alighted, after breakfast on the train, and commenced our walk to the Main Camp, three miles distant from Hector. With the lure of the wild mountain scenery firmly grafted into my limbs, and Martha's spirit ahead, we swung along at a comfortable pace, arriving at the Main Camp well under the hour.

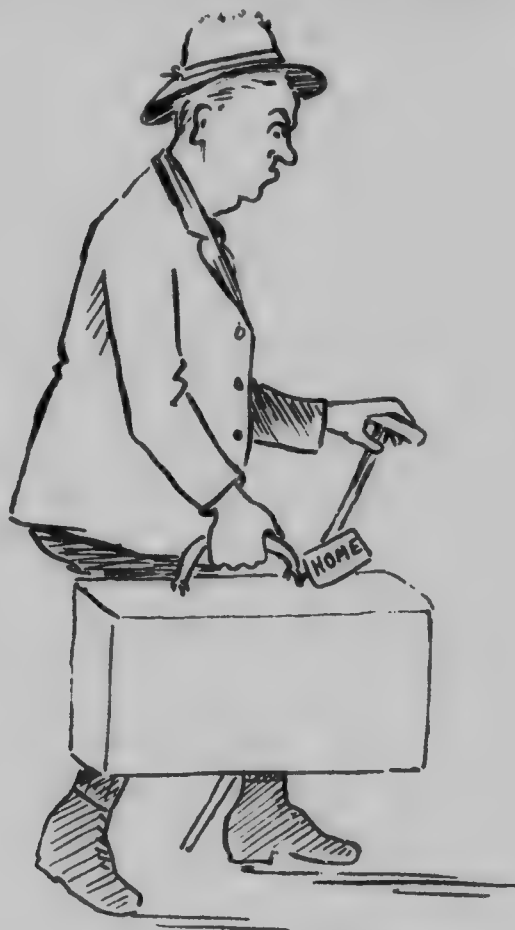
The genial Secretary met us, as they say in the West, with the Glad Hand and Cheery Smile, neither lacking in sincerity, and, as customary, at once proceeded to chide me for failing to herald my approach as a would-be Active with a timely warning of my intention. It was here that Martha relieved the tension of the situation with her playful aside, "Here's another truant," and the joy of the lost sheep come to repentance made everything appear plain and smooth sailing; in fact, I at once felt I was one of Mr. Mitchell's family and quite at home.

After registration and the necessary camp accommodation had been allotted, the question of climbing possibilities was discussed and decided upon. "You must take a short stroll to the subsidiary camp at Lake O'Hara, about six miles distant," whispered Martha. "Then the next day you are down for a try-out on Mount Schaffer." (A name one at once associates with "Old Indian Trails.") I was quite jubilant—then the awe-inspiring thought—a real climb up a glacier-hung mountain over 10,000 feet.



THE HALO WAS NOT FOR ME !

"Odaray is a beautiful climb," chimed in my newly-found Amazonian friends, looking up quite unconcernedly from their knitting; "and a 'ducky' walk of six miles before you reach the base of the mountain."



STILL A GRADUATING MEMBER

It was a cheerful prospect for my soft and pampered flesh to attempt to endure (*comme il vous plaira*) and I felt a sinking heart, a flagging spirit and an absolute absence of courage, until Martha reassured me, *sotto voce*, "It is not a difficult climb. We will be perfectly safe with Christian," she said.

And there he was, ready for my boots to put the creepers on the soles and make a pair of mountaineer's boots out of my perfectly good hunting shoe packs. And he did it, regaling me with sundry bear and goat-hunting stories the while, causing me again to experience pangs of remorse.

To think that I had irretrievably lost the association of these perfectly splendid specimens of physical, fearless, modest manhood for five years past and no earthly chance of overtaking it!

I was introduced to the Camp Fire that first evening after six o'clock supper. Camp fires are a *sine qua non* of all journeys into the forest primeval. Nevertheless, I like now, in the quiet seclusion of my own domestic hearth, to think that the Camp Fire evenings of the Alpine Club of Canada bid fair to be unique. Annie S. Peck, who searched for the apex of America, making a record climb of over 20,000 feet above sea level, was there to delight and instruct with her reminiscences. What a joy to meet the Alaskan scenic artist, Davis, in the flesh, and to hear how he kept *warm* in the lone Northland. To hear from the lips of no less an authority than Taverner, the Dominion Ornithologist, that hawks by destroying gophers at the rate of at least one every other day, atone for all their alleged depredations in the poultry yard, in this age of high cost of wheat. To see the Three Graces—mother and two daughters—entering into the spirit of camaraderie with a Graduation Song.

Alas! that I should not be permitted to meet the Great Mogul Director, Wheeler, at this Camp Fire. The reason I must hasten to tell, feeling satisfied that erring ones will appreciate the moral of my random story and will be sympathetic with my conclusion, if not deeply touched by my epilogue.

I assembled at roll call the next morning almost to the minute. *L'exactitude est la politesse du Roi*. I felt a *l'angly*

spirit and it was good to the taste. I was scheduled to conquer a mountain — attempt something, and *Deo volenti*, accomplish it.



I MADE MY VOW!

With a large plate of porridge tucked away comfortably, and my trusty alpenstock in hand, we started. I felt quite proud to be entrusted with a rucksack, the repository of three lunches, to be handed over to the guide at Camp O'Hara before starting on the ascent. We were away to a good start. The air was cool after

the early morning shower—Martha was with us, and all was well. We arrived, as we had departed, on schedule.

A righteous judgment upon me. The clouds were there first and shed a sprinkling rain, increasing with each effort at half-hourly intervals, until, unable to resist the temptation to rub it in to all slackers, even as I, the Great Unknown controlling the elements turned the rain to snow, and with sinking hearts we retraced our steps to the Main Camp—disappointed, but not (Oh, dear me, no!) downhearted, for in that retirement I learned many things. Martha realized she was not very successful with her remark that it was a pity we had not come into Camp when it opened, and sought to encourage me with the hope and expectation of a fine to-morrow.

To-morrow is the thought that had pursued and overtaken me for the past five years, and I was still a Graduating Member. To-day, the one period in that long lapse of time when the glorious possibility of seeing my name posted as an Active Member was almost within my grasp, had become Yesterday.

What a hopeless predicament—how could I face the wife of my bosom, the God-given mate, who, having tearfully consented to my “escape” to the perils of the mountains with their gaping crevasses and treacherous rock faces, anxiously awaited the moment of my victorious descent from the clouds and return to the felicity of our domestic hearth with the halo. To think that I could never tell my children I had climbed above the timber line—on over the glacier field—up the chimney—upon the ridge, and sat away up on the cairn and coasted part of the way back with true mountaineer’s delight.

As I stated at the commencement of these last few thoughts—what a hopeless predicament!

Martha came to the rescue again. Brave Martha. “Never mind if it does snow all night and we can’t climb to-morrow or the next day. It will soon be fine again. Why not try Stephen some week end?”

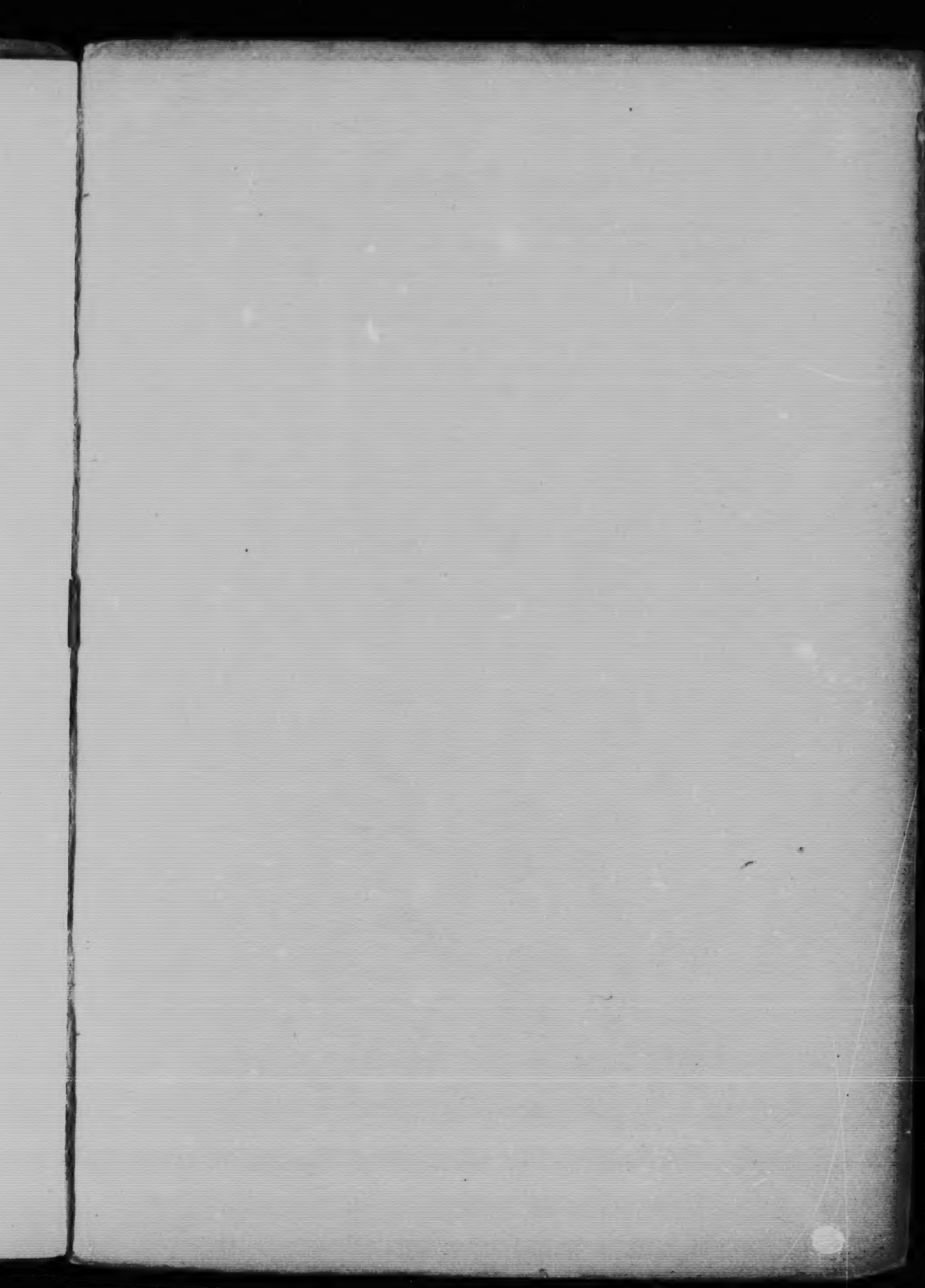
With my hand firmly clasping the trusty Guide Book, and with all the solemnity I could summon for the occasion, I made a vow, and whether it is laid down in the regulations of the Alpine Club of Canada or not, I neither know nor care. What I do know, and here write down, is, that when the mystical spirit of Martha in my evident distress whispered, "Wilt thou climb Mount Stephen soon?" I answered fervently, "I will; lead me to it."

EPILOGUE

If it be profitable to "Do it now," whatever the work at hand is in business pursuits, it is equally advantageous not to put off one's play. To you, sympathetic readers, who for a brief moment have turned Westward, and for a breathing space hovered on the summit of our Canadian Rockies, but have never explored the vastness of this great domain, I urge you to partake of the joy of your first Camp Fire without delay. To those Unqualified Members still struggling amid many temptations with their known duty to graduate as Actives of the Alpine Club of Canada, I conjure you to listen to Martha, make good your vow and climb something.



HAPPY THOUGHTS





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